

*Belgian Presidency of the  
Council of the European Union*

# **Social Security, Social Inclusion, Disability and Pensions**

Setting the Scene



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## Table of contents

<i>At the heart of Europe</i>	4
<i>Councils and Ministerial Meetings</i>	5
<i>Presidency conferences and technical meetings</i>	5
<i>Capita Selecta of Policy Themes during the Belgian EU Presidency in the field of Social Security, Social Inclusion, Disability and Pensions</i>	6
<i>Social Protection, the EU2020 strategy and future of the OMC process</i>	7
<i>The fight against poverty and the European Year 2010</i>	8
<i>Social Services of General Interest</i>	9
<i>Mainstreaming social impact in non-social policies</i>	10
<i>Child Poverty</i>	11
<i>Equal Rights for persons with disabilities</i>	12
<i>Assuring adequate pensions and social benefits</i>	13
<i>Homelessness in Europe</i>	14
<i>Social economy</i>	15
<i>Minimum Income Protection</i>	16
<i>The European Social Fund and the fight against poverty</i>	17
<i>Useful Contacts</i>	18



## At the heart of Europe

Social protection is at the heart of European society. It is the main difference between Europe and other industrialised regions in North America or Asia, and it ensures that economic growth coincides with social progress. Since the beginning of the European Union, the question of how the EU can enforce Member States' social security systems has arisen. In the founding Treaty of Rome, the EU states aimed at promoting full employment and social progress, fighting social exclusion and discrimination, and promoting social justice and social protection. In the past, as well as in the present, the Belgian position always has been strongly in favour of a more social European Union.

The Belgian EU presidency is a unique opportunity to move the European social agenda forward, albeit one small step at a time. This holds true especially with regard to the EU2020 strategy, the implementation of which should take off under the Belgian Presidency. In the following paragraphs we provide a short summary of the upcoming Belgian EU presidency in the fields of Social Security, Social Inclusion, Disability and Pensions.

## Councils and Ministerial Meetings

Date	Subject of Event	Location
8-9 July 2010	Informal EPSCO	Brussels
19 October 2010	Informal meeting of the Ministers in charge of the fight against Poverty	Brussels
21 October 2010	Formal EPSCO	Brussels
6-7 December 2010	Formal EPSCO	Brussels

## Presidency conferences and technical meetings

Date	Subject of Event	Location
1 July 2010	Presentation of the Belgian EU Presidency Program	Brussels
2-3 September 2010	Child Poverty conference	Marche-en-Famenne
6-8 September 2010	Conference on assuring adequate pensions and social benefits for all European citizens	Liège
13-15 September 2010	EU Coordination in the social field in the context of Europe 2020	La Hulpe
18-19 October 2010	Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion	Brussels
20-21 October 2010	Administrative Commission	Brussels
20-23 October 2010	MISSOC	Wépion
26-27 October 2010	3rd Forum of Social Services of General Interest	Brussels
27-28 October 2010	Social Economy	Brussels
18-19 November 2010	Work Forum for the Implementation of the UN Disability Convention	Brussels
18-19 November 2010	ESF and the fight against poverty	Brussels
25 November 2010	Communication on pension rights in Europe	Brussels
9-10 December 2010	Consensus conference on Homelessness	Brussels
15-16 December 2010	Administrative Commission	Brussels
16-17 December 2010	Closing European Year on Poverty and Social Exclusion	Brussels

*Capita Selecta of Policy Themes during the Belgian EU  
Presidency in the field of Social Security, Social Inclusion,  
Disability and Pensions*






## Social Protection, the EU2020 strategy and future of the OMC process

Ten years after the implementation of the Lisbon targets, the OMC strategy has not lived up to all expectations. The Commission has recently acknowledged the gap between the objectives and results (Renewed Commitment to Social Europe, 2008). This calls for reflection on future EU strategies to improve social cohesion. The new EU2020 Strategy puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities: smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. In order to define where the EU wants to be by 2020, five headline targets have been adopted, including the objective to bring twenty million people out of poverty by the next decade. The Belgian EU Presidency stresses the importance of the Open Method of Coordination in the implementation of the EU2020 strategy, as well as the need for social policy that goes beyond the fight against poverty.

### **Related Events**

- \* *EU Coordination in the social field in the context of Europe 2020*
- \* *Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion*
- \* *Conference on assuring adequate pensions and social benefits for all European citizens*



## The fight against poverty and the European Year 2010

Poverty remains a major social problem in the European Union. Too many Europeans live at risk of poverty, which means they face insecurity, and go without what most people often take for granted. Living in poverty may give rise to a variety of problems, from not having enough money to spend on food and clothes to poor housing conditions and even homelessness. Poverty also means having to cope with fewer options that may lead to social exclusion. The Belgian EU Presidency is raising awareness on poverty, with particular focus on specific groups in a vulnerable socio-economic position such as children and disabled people.

The new EU2020 objective to bring 20 million people out of poverty acknowledges the political and social importance of the fight against poverty. This is a major step forward, and encourages everyone to continue his efforts. The Belgian Presidency will invite the heads of State and Government to adopt a Declaration on this issue. This Declaration should reflect concrete, feasible commitments of Member States in the fight against poverty, and be presented at the Closing Event of the European Year for combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010. People experiencing poverty will take part in this event.

The Presidency fully acknowledges the importance of not just talking about people living in poverty, but of listening to them and making sure their voices are heard and taken into account to shape the policy. For this reason, the Belgian Presidency will give a significant place to people living in poverty in all its poverty-related events.

### Related Events

- \* Closing session of the Year against Poverty
- \* Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion
- \* Child Poverty Conference
- \* Conference on Homelessness





## Social Services of General Interest

*Social Services of General Interest (SSGI) play a vital role in European society and make a significant contribution to the fulfilment of basic EU objectives such as social, economic and territorial cohesion, a high level of employment, social inclusion and economic growth. However, the EU legal framework, which suits the market sector (EU competition law, internal market regulation including EU public procurement regulations ...) is not totally adapted to the way social services are organised: their specificity -given the aforementioned roles- should be taken into account more explicitly.*

*Their explicit mention in the Lisbon Treaty marks a new starting point for Social Services of General Interest.*

*In October 2010, the Commission will submit its Second Biennial Report on SSGI which will be discussed during the 3rd SSGI Forum. Particularly in the special Social Protection Committee (SPC) working group, the 3rd Forum will look into quality of SSGI and a voluntary quality framework for social services in Europe. In accordance with the EU-TRIO programme and the "EU2020 Strategy", the Belgian Presidency will examine the Commission's new initiatives and put forward alternative policy approaches to tackle legal and technical issues.*

### **Related Events**

- \* 3rd Forum of Social Services of General Interest
- \* EU Coordination in the social field in the context of Europe 2020
- \* Conference on assuring adequate pensions and social benefits for all European citizens
- \* Round Table on Poverty and Social Inclusion
- \* Conference on social economy



## Mainstreaming social impact in non-social policies

*With the implementation of the new Lisbon treaty, the horizontal social clause has come into effect. This clause calls for a stronger assessment of social impacts throughout the EU policy process. At this time, important social questions are too often the competence of Directorates in non-social areas. Social Mainstreaming is an important policy tool which leads to better regulation by taking social impacts into account when evaluating policy options. Assessing social impacts will lead to better informed decision making on the political level, to a stronger social dimension of EU policy, and eventually to a more cohesive European Union. To come to a balanced decision it is essential to assess the EU's social goals simultaneously with its other objectives.*

*The Belgian Presidency will push forward the discussion on how to strengthen social impact assessment at EU level, in particular by promoting already existing instruments. We emphasize the need for increased visibility and use of the Commission's Impact Assessment (IA), an intensified analysis of social impacts in the IA, and a more intensive application of IA by all actors involved.*

### **Related events**

- \* *EU Coordination in the social field in the context of Europe 2020*
- \* *Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion*
- \* *Conference on assuring adequate pensions and social benefits for all European citizens*
- \* *3rd Forum of Social Services of General Interest*
- \* *Informal EPSCO*



## Child Poverty

Poverty and social exclusion have damaging effects on opportunities for children in their future lives, and their future capacity to contribute to tomorrow's society. For the first time, the Lisbon Treaty includes promotion of children's rights as an explicit objective of the EU. The Commission Working Document on the EU2020 Strategy recognised child poverty as one of the EU's long-term social challenges which have been further exacerbated by the financial and economic crisis. At the opening Conference of the European Year for Combating Poverty, President Barroso called for a reduction of child poverty 'because current figures are intolerable'.

In collaboration with the European Commission, Eurochild and Unicef, the Belgian Presidency is organising a Conference on Child Poverty (September 2010). Three main aspects of child poverty will be debated during the conference: adequate resources for all children and their families, access to quality services and child participation.

The European Commission also plans to adopt a Communication on the Poverty Platform by the last quarter of 2010. This Communication will contain a specific chapter on Child Poverty. The aim of the Belgian Presidency is to pave the way to the adoption of a Recommendation on child poverty.

### Related Events

- \* Conference on Child Poverty
- \* EU Coordination in the social field in the context of Europe 2020



## Equal Rights for persons with disabilities

At the end of 2006, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the new binding Convention 'Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities'. This treaty is the first comprehensive human rights convention to which the EU is a supplemental partner in addition to the 27 Member States. In June 2010, 87 countries (15 EU-members including Belgium), have already completed the ratification process.

The implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) envisages using an integrated policy on disability (handistreaming), through the development of a suitable monitoring system that is applicable in all EU Member States. This UN Convention is a key instrument in making permanent and efficient handistreaming policies a reality. These policies will be at the heart of the new European strategic approach to disability (Disability Action Plan 2010-2020). The Belgian Presidency continues to work on the UNCRPD Code of Conduct in the EC. This Code of Conduct encourages efficient cooperation between the EU, the Member States and the United Nations in the implementation of the UNCRPD.

During the Spanish Presidency, the proposed Resolution on the New Disability Framework was approved. The latter declares that the "mainstreaming" principle will be used in all future policies at the level of both the Europe 2020 strategy and the Member States. The Resolution also stresses the need for a swift implementation of the UN Convention. All future EU Presidencies are invited to continue their efforts to reinforce the European perspective on human rights of persons with disabilities, to promote full social inclusion and full achievement of equal opportunities and non-discrimination and to ensure adequate participation of all stakeholders.

### Related events

- \* Work Forum for the Implementation of the UN Disability Convention
- \* Round Table on Poverty and Social Inclusion
- \* 3rd Forum of Social Services of General Interest



## Assuring adequate pensions and social benefits

In many respects, pension policy represents the cornerstone of contemporary European welfare states. Generations of Europeans have benefited from the implementation of public pension schemes, and cross-national surveys show that there is still population-wide support for the efforts made by European governments to provide adequate income benefits after retirement. However, the reform of pension systems has emerged as a key issue in most European countries during the nineties. For more than a decade, the importance of achieving both adequacy and sustainability of pension systems has been stressed, but without specifying how both can be achieved simultaneously.

The Belgian EU Presidency will focus on the social aspects of pension reforms, partially drawing on the findings of a joint report by the Social Protection Committee and the Economic Policy Committee on the adequacy and sustainability of pension systems in Europe, on the Commission's Green Paper on Pensions, and on the results of the Spanish Presidency.

According to both EPC-SPC and the Commission, the challenge in public pension delivery increasingly lies in achieving adequate replacement levels while ensuring sustainability. Therefore, the Belgian Presidency wants to re-assert the need for reconciling pension adequacy with the constraints of economic and fiscal sustainability. The Belgian Presidency would like to reinforce the OMC on Pensions and complement it with one or several baseline objectives for pension adequacy on a European level. Almost all Member states plead for a minimum level of income in the absence of 'sufficient' other income. Such schemes can serve as a realistic starting point for the introduction of baseline objectives on a European level.

### Related Events

- \* Conference on assuring adequate pensions and social benefits for all European citizens
- \* Communication on pension rights in Europe
- \* MISSOC Conference



## Homelessness in Europe

*The Joint Report of the Commission and the Council on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2009 stated that 'sustained work is required to tackle homelessness as an extremely serious form of exclusion'. Furthermore, the OMC on social protection and social inclusion had designated homelessness and housing exclusion as a thematic priority in 2009. In addition, the European Parliament adopted a written declaration (2008) on ending street homelessness, calling on the Commission to develop a European framework definition of homelessness, to collect comparable and reliable statistical data, and to provide annual updates on action taken and progress made in the Member States.*

*Since a common European strategy on homelessness has not yet been defined, the consensus conference, organised jointly by the Belgian presidency, the European Commission and FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Homelessness Organisations) seeks to establish a common understanding of fundamental questions about homelessness, which can provide a basis for future policy progress. People who experienced homelessness themselves will have an important place in this Conference.*

### **Related Events**

- \* Consensus Conference on Homelessness



## Social economy

*The issue of the social economy is dealt with in various areas. While the debates on the different forms of entrepreneurship, access to finance for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) and SME legislation emphasise the economic dimension, the social reality comes to the forefront when social economy enterprises are acknowledged as key actors in active inclusion strategies.*

*These two elements form a crossroad in the current debate on the EU2020 strategy. Unfortunately, the strategy, at this stage, does not mention the social economy, although being essential in the implementation of the strategy.*

*Following the initiative taken by the Spanish Presidency, the Belgian Presidency will also highlight this topic through a European conference on social economy. This will be a coordinated event involving the Federal State, the regions and the German Speaking Community, since social economy is a shared competence in Belgium. These actors want to put forward a positive message to the European Union showing why investing in the most vulnerable people is important and what consequences this may have.*

*To ensure better visibility of the event and to place the debate within the broader debate on SSGI, the Social Economy Conference will be held just after the 3rd Forum on Social Services of General Interest.*

### **Related Events**

- \* Social Economy Conference



## Minimum Income Protection

The milestone 1992 Council Recommendations on social protection (92/441/EEC; 92/442/EEC) call upon the Member States “to recognise the basic right of a person to sufficient resources and social assistance to live in a manner compatible with human dignity as part of a comprehensive and consistent drive to combat social exclusion”. The focus on alleviating poverty and preventing social exclusion has evolved into the more comprehensive framework of social inclusion. This basically implies acknowledgement that social exclusion is about much more than simply the lack of resources.

The framework of Minimum Income Protection has evolved into the Active Inclusion Recommendation (COM/2008/639). Active Inclusion distinguishes three pillars of social protection, one of them being Minimum Income protection (namely adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services). All three pillars are essential in achieving greater cohesion and should work together in order to allow full-fledged social participation.

The Commission stressed the importance of decent minimum income protection to accompany labour market policies: “active inclusion policies should facilitate the integration into sustainable, quality employment of those who can work and provide resources which are sufficient to live in dignity, together with support for social participation, for those who cannot” (COM/2008/639).

The Belgian Presidency wants to explore the possibility of identifying a common EU framework on adequate minimum income schemes, comprising common criteria concerning adequacy, coverage and accessibility.

### Related Events

- \* EU Coordination in the social field in the context of Europe 2020
- \* Conference on assuring adequate pensions and social benefits for all European citizens
- \* Round Table on Poverty and Social Inclusion
- \* Informal Meeting of the Ministers in charge of the Fight against Poverty
- \* Work Forum for the Implementation of the UN Disability Convention





## The European Social Fund and the fight against poverty

The structural funds play an important role in social cohesion. The reform of the structural funds has led to the termination of the Equal programme, which had a major impact on projects in the social field.

As discussions on the future structural funds programme and their key objectives will start in upcoming months, the role of the Structural funds in the fight against poverty will be highlighted.

In close collaboration with the European Commission, the various Belgian ESF Agencies will organise a seminar on the role of ESF in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The first objective of the seminar is to present best practices and recommendations of the different ESF managing authorities, in order to show how poverty and social exclusion can be prevented in the framework of the ESF.

### Related Events

- \* Seminar ESF and the fight against poverty



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